

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

November 24, 2004

(This week's edition is being sent on Wed., Nov. 24, because of the Thanksgiving holiday.)

The Week Ahead

Mon., Nov. 29

Commissioner Miller attends the comptroller's exit audit and TAC/CRI meetings.

Fri., Dec. 3

Commissioner Miller attends the Tennessee Economic Council on Women, where she presents on a panel with Gina Lodge and Donna Cheek.

DCS Retirements

DCS is bidding farewell to the following employees:

John Sparks, fiscal director 3, is retiring on December 3. A retirement reception and celebration in his honor will be held on Thu., Dec. 2, from 1-3 p.m. in conference rooms A and B on the second floor of the Cordell Hull Building.

Jerry Hughett, director of licensure, will be retiring in early 2005. According to Debbie Childress, "Jerry has spent over 40 years of his life dedicated to the welfare of children and their families. We miss him already. He is the kind of guy who just slipped out the door with no fanfare, but in our hearts we will forever be thankful for his many years of service."

If you are retiring or know a DCS employee who has recently retired or will be retiring in the near future, please send such announcements to public information officer K. Danielle Edwards at K.Danielle.Edwards@state.tn.us.

Streamlining the Adoption Process

Submitted by Elizabeth Black, Executive Director – Office of Child Permanency

We are streamlining our process of adoptions in Tennessee to improve outcomes for children. Regional and private provider adoption leaders met with leaders from our central office and an adoptive parent last week at the Adoption Retreat to review a comprehensive plan. A follow-up meeting will be held on December 20 in Nashville with adoption leaders from all of the continuum providers and all 12 DCS regions to discuss implementation.

These questions and answers summarize some of the major decisions made during this retreat.

How will we use data to evaluate our practice?

The DCS Office of Performance Enhancement plans to provide data packets to all regions and all private providers that will be accompanied by technical assistance to assist in interpreting and using the data effectively. Self reports from DCS regions and private providers are no longer needed. Data packets will be available on a monthly basis beginning in January 2005.

These packets will contain child-specific information on all children who have been in custody for over one year and will be broken down by provider and region. Outcome data will accompany this information on a quarterly basis.

How we will ensure that all prospective resource parents are approved to foster children as well as adopt children?

Office of Child Permanency and Performance Evaluation staff are revising policies 16.3, 16.4, 16.16 and 16.8 to ensure that all of the requirements for adopting children are identical to those requirements for fostering children. The Resource Parent Application has been revised to support this dual approval process.

These are the action steps that remain to complete this shift to a dual approval process in Tennessee.

- Develop a high quality home study process that streamlines the home study outline and begin using autobiography questionnaires.
- Add a grandfather clause in Policy 16.8 for present “adoptive only” parents in regards to the new in-service training requirements.
- Incorporate information from the Mutual Selection form into policy 16.16 related to resource home denial/closure.
- Identify, combine, and eliminate forms.
- Add into Policy 16.4 to distribute Resource Parent Rights during first session of PATH.
- Add into Policy 16.4 to set up fingerprinting and home study consultations by session three.
- Ensure exclusive assignment of staff to train PATH and write home studies.
- Maintain PATH schedule on DCS Internet.
- Develop a joint calendar of training between the private providers and DCS.
- Update the Resource Parent Handbook.

Please let us know if you think of any additional steps that need to be taken to ensure that we have a dual approval process in Tennessee.

How will we develop and support a local process for approving adoption subsidies?

As of November 1, each region is now responsible for making determinations about adoption assistance. Both Anita Cowan (615-741-9858) and Cathlyn Samuel (615-532-5548) are available to assist regions in making these determinations.

The following have been accomplished:

- Equity between board rates for foster care and adoption.
- No additional approval is required for special circumstances if child approved in foster care or for a negotiated board rate.
- Guidelines of rates for negotiated adoption assistance available to regional staff.
- Eligibility for adoption assistance now available to all children in DCS custody.

These policies are now on the server and available to the DCS regions.

- APP 15.11 Adoption Assistance Agreements Maintenance Payments
- APP 16.29 Adoption, Foster and Kinship Care Board Rates
- APP 15.15 Determining Eligibility for Adoption Assistance

How we will streamline the adoption process through private providers?

It is our expectation that our continuum providers will be responsible for providing placement and treatment services to children as well as permanency services for children. If a child is in the Omni Visions Continuum, it is our expectation that Omni Visions is ensuring that the child has a place to live, needed treatment and support services, and that Omni Visions is aggressively working with the child and family team for the child to be reunified with her parents, placed with her grandmother or to have a new family created for and with her. This means that we will be expecting that all of the children in all of our continuums are receiving adoption services through that continuum.

To reduce the high numbers of children and youth who have been in custody for over one year, we have agreed to enter into special contracts with all continuum providers who have children for whom a finalization is expected prior to June 30, 2005. These continuums will be paid \$10,000.00 at the time of the adoption finalization. Kathy Jones will have the contracts completed by December 3, 2004.

The Regional DCS Cross Functional Teams, supported by Judy Cole and Suzanne White in Central Office, make decisions regarding additional children who may need adoption services through private providers and assuring that every child in every region has is receiving permanency services, including adoption services.

How do we plan to make placement decisions when a child is ready to be adopted and no family has been identified?

These decisions will be made in the context of the child and family team. There is a process being developed to assist in situations when a child has been waiting for a longer period of time. We are discussing the specifics of this plan and, once completed, will outline this plan in state policy.

CORE Leadership Meeting Beth Kasch, Presiding November 16, 2004

Placement Exceptions

Waivers and exceptions have been used interchangeably, but there is a difference between the two. Exceptions are deviations from the Brian A. lawsuit and require written justification from regional administrators. Waivers deal with policy in terms of qualifications. TAC took a sampling of exceptions and waivers for three months, with undesirable findings. CPPP monitored waivers and exceptions over a month-long period, discovering that 20 percent of exception waivers had not been signed by RAs (some indicated verbal approval), and 10 percent include incorrect information.

The cross-functional teams will implement a process through which waivers/exceptions use best practice standards in decision-making. It was stated that regimented, “hard and fast” rules related to best practice can be challenging because of the complexity of human behavior. The department stresses good judgment that reflects the use of best practice.

Principle 9: DCS will consider the totality of circumstances to make decisions that are in the best interests of each child and will not apply any single principle or standard of practice if doing so results in a negative outcome for the child.

TAC was insistent that RAs be held accountable for decisions regarding waivers and exceptions. All waivers aren't negative, like keeping sibling groups together.

Suzanne White is working with Kent Berkley to develop an instrument to look at waivers and will use cross-functional teams. They will begin to implement this new instrument region by region and will be completed by Jan. 2005.

Cross-Functional Team

A Cross Functional Team was implemented in Shelby County and focused on the adoption process. The meeting included Suzanne White, Judy Cole, Antionette Holman, private providers, adoption staff and senior management. Private providers will be working with Shelby Co. to assist in finalizing 50 adoptions. The providers will provide a weekly update to the RA on their progress. A follow-up meeting has been scheduled for November to see where they are on their goals. This is very similar to the CQI process, which will also include Daryl Chansuthus. In the future, this group should participate in the case file review process.

Performance Based-Contracting

Chapin Hall, which has been praised for using longitudinal data, has been involved with DCS in this area. We want a statewide database with specific outcomes to drive data back to the regions. Chapin Hall will be providing us with cohort data by providers, provider comparisons and regional comparisons. Hamilton County is serving as the pilot for this project. Fred Wulczyn will be working on this area with RAs on December 7 to explain this process.

Regional Needs

The Commissioner wants to set up time with certain judges in the spring when she is making regional visits. Steve Hornsby will coordinate this schedule with Lane.

Retreat

The next statewide retreat will be held Feb. 16-18. The CLT will partner with regions/liaisons to develop an agenda and theme for the retreat.

CQI In Action

The CQI column will return next week.



Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.

-John F. Kennedy

Nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.

-Georg Wilhelm